DISCRIMINATION AND COPING OF OLD SETTLERS IN SIKKIM

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Abstract

The study was conducted to explore the existence and manifestation of discrimination in Sikkim. In the Indian context, race-based discrimination has been extensively studied from the point of view of the northeasterners residing in mainland India. An important reason for this is the dfferences in race, culture, language and minority status of the northeasterners in mainland India. However, within the northeastern states all of the above mentioned aspects are reversed and the minority is the mainland Indian community, race-based discrimination has not been studied. Sikkim was considered as the region for study as it is part of the sister states of the north-eastern region and the Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions has acknowledged that discrimination has been practiced in the state. An exploratory sequential mixed design was adopted for the study. Eleven telephonic semi-structured interviews were conducted for the qualitative phase with members of the 'old settlers' of Sikkim. A survey was conducted for the quantitative phase. Thematic analysis revealed two global theme, five organizing themes and 44 basic themes. Survey method revealed that 51% of old settlers felt discriminated daily in Sikkim. The results revealed that race based discrimination does exist in Sikkim with it being purported at institutional and interpersonal levels.

Keywords: Discrimination, Sikkim, Old Settlers, Plainsman, Locals

Introduction

Literature on race-based discrimination in India has focused on the experiences of *Northeasterners*, in mainland India. However, within the north-eastern region, differences in physical, ethnic and cultural aspects, along with reversed demographic conditions could lead to discrimination against the mainlanders. In the study, the state of Sikkim has been considered as it is a part of the eight "sister states" in the north eastern region (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Second, less than 10 percent of the population is formed by the mainlanders (Kharel & Bhutia, 2013). Third, the state merged with India in 1975, therefore giving it less time than any other north-eastern state to assimilation and integration with India. Fourth, the existence of discrimination against the old settlers (mainland Indians living in Sikkim prior to 1975) was acknowledged by the Rajya Sabha Committee of Petitions in 2013. Fifth, the Sikkim Subject Certificate holder (SSH) or the Certificate of Identification (COI) is used as a tool to reduce access of old settlers to many welfare schemes.

Perceived discrimination is a psychosocial stressor, linked with negative effects such as higher stress levels, anxiety, depression, hostility, psychoticism, and higher dropout rates (Okazaki, 2009; Ong, 2013; Dion & Kawakami, 1996). It can also have positive buffering effects on the victim where they show increased identification with existing in-group stereotypes, to buffer negative effects on self-esteem (see also, Dion, 2002).

According to the integrative theoretical model of coping with collective disadvantage, two processes against discrimination exist (Van Zomeren et al., 2004). First, the emotional route, where the discriminated members act against the negative experience because the situation angers them. Second is the efficacy route, where the discriminated group believes that their situation can change if they act cohesively in the long term (Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Sohi & Singh (2015) found that for the Northeasterners in Delhi, anger was linked with the tendency for collective action.

Review of Literature

The realistic group conflict theory (RGCT), postulated that when in-group solidarity is high and intergroup hostility is most severe, then competition for resources is extreme. Since there is an existence of different identity categorizations between the northeast Indians and the mainland Indians, intergroup conflict may arise. Tajfel & Turner (1979) went further and investigated discrimination on line of group division and postulated that an individual's identity is based on their group membership, and can lead to increased in-group preference (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1990). In Sikkim, the majority racial group would give preference for resources to their in-group members rather than the 'old settlers'.

The behaviour from intergroup affect and stereotypes map (BIAS map) studies on the other hand, attempted to provide reasons why discrimination occurs in specific ways towards certain groups. (Ramiah, Hewstone, Dovidio, & Penner, 2010). Active and passive forms of discrimination differed depending on the view held by the dominant group on the out-groups competence and their feelings of warmth.

Within this backdrop, it is important to understand the level of discrimination faced by the 'old settlers' in Sikkim and the manifestations of this discrimination.

Rationale and significance for the study

Studies have taken a one-dimensional view on race-based discrimination. It is equally important to investigate whether aspects of racial discrimination within north-eastern states. The aim of this study was to explore perceived discrimination in Sikkim against old settlers. The following objectives were considered:

1. To explore the existence of discrimination in Sikkim faced by old settlers.

2. To investigate the manifestation of discrimination in Sikkim faced by old settlers.

3. To investigate the perceived reasons and coping strategies used by old settlers.

Method

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of CHRIST (Deemed to be University).

Sample

Eleven old settlers were part of the qualitative phase of the study (Mean age = 52.3, SD = 16.18). Six participants were senior citizens (above 65), four participants were emerging adults (20-40), and one participant was in their middle adulthood (40-60). Eight old settlers identified themselves as males, and three as females. Eight participants belonged to the Marwari community, two from the Bihari community, and one from the Punjabi community. All participants had cleared their matriculation and belonged to the middle or high socioeconomic status group. Convenient and snowball sampling method was employed.

Since there was a dearth of literature on the topic, theoretical sampling was chosen as the best method to inform the sample size of the current study. Theoretical saturation was achieved by the 11th interview as similar experiences were shared by the participants and no new themes could be identified. For example, prominent themes expressed were in terms of political, legal, interpersonal, and institutional forms.

For phase two, 90 adult old settlers (Mean age = 40.11 and SD = 14.72) were surveyed using convenience and snowball sampling. Of the participants, 77 individuals identified as males and 13 as females. Sixty participants were Marwari and thirty were Biharis. All participants had cleared their matriculation and belonged to either middle or higher socioeconomic class. An important criterion for selection was that the individual must have been born in Sikkim.

For studies dealing with vulnerable populations with politically sensitive topics smaller sample sizes are considered adequate (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

Research Design

The study followed an exploratory sequential mixed design conducted in two phases. The first phase followed a qualitative cross-sectional study design. Semi-structured in-depth interviews via telephonic conversations were the primary source for data collection. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. The second phase of the research study was quantitative and employed a survey research design. The survey design was employed to understand the incidence of discrimination felt by the old settlers. The conclusions of the two phases would be used triangulated to develop the results.

Procedure

Phase 1

The participants were contacted via the Association of Old Settlers of Sikkim (AOSS) and the researcher's network. Participants provided consent via audio recording. They were informed about the topic under study, their voluntary participation, and that the audio recording would be confidential and not shared with anyone other than the researcher, supervisor, and other supporting

individuals. Eleven telephonic semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were transcribed on the same day and the transcriptions were sent back to the participants for their perusal. Following their confirmation, the interviews were considered for analysis. The participants did not suggest any changes. The audio files were saved in password-protected folders and deleted once the research study was completed.

For phase two of the study, the survey was conducted on two fronts. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher could not enter Sikkim during the first wave and developed Google forms to collect data. 56 participants answered the form via Google forms. Once the researcher had access to enter Sikkim, he collected data from 34 individuals using a traditional paper-pencil format. Informed consent was taken from the participants in both formats and participation was voluntary. All the collected data was fed into IBM SPSS, cleaned and then analysed using frequency and percentage analysis.

Measures

Semi-structured Interview

For the first phase of the study, based on the SIT, RGCT, and BIAS map, a semi-structured interview guide with questions and probes was developed in English and Hindi. The semi-structured interview was validated by three experts in the field. The questions explored the understanding of discrimination, the types and manifestations of discrimination, and the ways that participants deal with it. For example, Could you explain your understanding of the term discrimination? Have you ever experienced discrimination? Could you tell me about your experience? Questions had probes concerning employment, education, governmental, economic, personal, and social situations.

Demographic Data Sheet

The demographic data sheet used for the second phase of the study. It included questions such as Name (optional), Age, Are you an old settler, Gender, Which community do they belong to, Type of work engaged in.

Everyday Discrimination Scale

For the second phase of the study, the Everyday Discrimination Scale was employed. It was a nine-item questionnaire with a 5 point Likert format. Based on phase one, 2 items were removed as they were not mentioned in the interviews. These were "You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores" and "People act as if they are afraid of you." Items selected included questions such as "You are treated with less respect than other people (locals)", "You are treated with less courtesy than other people (locals)" Response options included 0: never; 1: seldom; 2: sometimes; and 3: often. Total scores could range from 0 to 21 with a higher score representing greater perceived discrimination. Reliability for the everyday discrimination scale was Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$.

Data Collection

For both phases of the study, the scholar reached out to many old settlers but faced resistance. The resistance from the prospective participants was due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic and they were fearful of their identity being revealed even after the repeated assurance of the researcher that the data would be confidential.

For phase one, the participants were found via the AOSS, the researcher's network and through convenient and snowball sampling. The participants were informed about the ethics

bounding the researcher and were provided with a detailed briefing about the measures that would be taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity such as saving the recordings in password-protected folders and deletion once the study was completed. No references were made throughout the interviews concerning the participants' age, name, address, or any other identifiable information. They were given a brief overview of the study and its implications. Participants provided verbal audio recorded consent and were informed that could skip any question(s) or end the interview. Seven participants gave the interview in Hindi and four in English. Each interview lasted between 30-50 minutes and was transcribed by the researcher. Since the researcher was also familiar with both languages, he transliterated the Hindi interviews into English.

For phase two, similar resistance was met even after the name section on the demographic data sheet was made optional. Informed consent was taken and the participants were informed about the nature of the study. 56 participants answered the questionnaire on Google forms, and 34 in paper-pencil format.

Data analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed for the study. It is considered an appropriate method of analysis when dealing with unexplored populations and topics (Braun & Clark, 2006). The analysis was embedded in a constructivist epistemological position as the objective was to understand the experience of discrimination for the old settlers and how these experiences shape their reality. The assumption was that their experiences and accounts would be constructed via their interpersonal interaction within the social structure in Sikkim. To ensure the validity of the study we chose theories that have robust evidence as the foundation for the interview guide and analysis.

The steps of thematic analysis specified by Braun and Clark (2006) were used in the study. The codes and resultant themes were broadly informed by the SIT, RGCT, and the BIAS map. The transcribed interviews were independently coded by three experts (including the PhD scholar) after multiple readings. Basic themes were developed based on the participants' interviews. Organizing themes were formed and defined based on the similarities across the basic themes. The three researchers reached a consensus on the final basic and organizing themes after joint meetings. Repetitively occurring themes were combined. Agreement on the number of basic, organising, and global themes was reached. Finally, the themes were shared with the participants and finalized upon their approval.

Quantitative Analysis

For phase two, data was imported to IBM SPSS and analysed using frequency analysis to arrive at the results.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was paramount to ensure the quality of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nelson, 2008). The methods and procedures were continually conducted with subject matter experts to maintain confirmability of the study. Three researchers independently coded and developed the themes to ensure investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Participants' feedback was conducted to ensure member checks. Confirmability, dependability, and credibility were supported by triangulation and member checks. Reflexivity enhanced the overall trustworthiness of the study. For instance, the researcher belongs to the old settlers and he continued to engage and reflect on his biases. The two other researchers allowed for peer reflexivity since they were not from the old settler community. For example, the participants claimed that the amount of verbal discrimination

had reduced, the study incorporated this finding even though the researcher had conflicting opinion on the matter.

Ethical Implications

The participants provided consent and were informed that participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was ensured by saving the data in password-protected files and since no names for the participants were collected. Beneficence was ensured by letting participants decide which questions they wanted to answer. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of CHRIST (Deemed to be University).

Results

Two global theme, five organizing themes, and 44 basic themes were developed.

Institutional Discrimination

Participants felt discriminated by the state government were it reduces educational, economic, political, employment, and health benefits for the old settlers.

> *When the state merged into India, the Indian government forgot about us. They did not give us voting rights... Here in Sikkim my whole life has passed by but I haven't yet gotten my rights. (PT)*

Interpersonal Discrimination

Participants reported interpersonal discrimination against the old settlers including the use of physical intimidation, ethnic slurs, and derogatory comments on social media.

Names like dhoti-ganthe, the one who wears dhoti or Kainyan or Madhise, the one who is from madhesh... Out here, the tone in which the bhaiya word is used, you can also say a bit racial. (SN)

Perceived Discrimination

Participants felt that the discrimination against them took place as they were racially different, and in minority. They also felt that the locals were threatened of their economic success and they lived in fear of being further subjugated.

When I say about old settlers, there are Marwari, Bihari families also and there are few people from Nepalese origin also who have been staying in Sikkim for the past, maybe 30-40-50 years also and they are not the subjects. But what happens is that they mingle around easily because of their face cutting however, we are segregated because of our face cutting. (SN)

Reaction

The participants expressed anger and disappointment to their discriminatory experiences. They felt betrayed by the central government as the GOI had not taken care of their interests.

"I had cousins who were brilliant and wanted to utilize the quota seats for medical from the state through merit, but because of discrimination they couldn't, even though they were meritorious. We have no state welfare for these things." (SA)

Coping Strategies

To cope with the discriminatory experience some participants accepted discrimination, others wanted to acculturate with the state. The younger generation decided to out-migrate as they felt that it was the only way to get equal rights.

> *"In Sikkim, discrimination still exists. But the law itself is discriminatory. If you have made the law in such a manner, what can one do?" (AB)*

Table 2.

Percentage of Discrimination felt per item on the Everyday Discrimination Scale, N = 90

Items	Percentage
1. You are treated with less courtesy than other people (locals).	61.11
2. You are treated with less respect than other people (locals).	58.14
3. People (locals) act as if they think you are not smart.	44.44
4. People (locals) act as if they think you are dishonest.	42.96
5. People (locals) act as if they think you are not as good as they are.	55.18
6. You are called names or insulted.	46.67
7. You are threatened or harassed.	57.40
Average Everyday Discrimination	52.33
Do you feel like the state government has acted against your interests?	45.55

Discussion

Thematic analysis of the interviews indicated that discrimination is experienced by the old settlers. At the institutional level, the Sikkim state government has passed multiple laws that reduce the access of old settlers to welfare policies related to education, employment, healthcare, taxation, and land purchases. This finding is in line with the SIT and RGCT, where the majority is expected to show in-group preference especially for resource allocation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Sherif,

1966). The participants also alluded to feeling fearful of physical violence, stereotyped, and facing verbal hostility in the form of ethnic slurs in interpersonal settings indicating the existence of interpersonal forms of discrimination that are both active and passive in nature. In line with the BIAS map studies, the participants claimed that the reason they face discrimination is due to their racial difference (low warmth) from the northeasterners and their economic competence (Cuddy, et al., 2007; Ramiah, et al., 2010). The existence of institutional discrimination in the state of Sikkim is of concern as it points toward the existence of systemic racism (Hutchison, Abrams, & Christian, 2007). Findings indicated that race-based discrimination in India can be considered region-specific, dependent on the size of the groups similar to how northeasterners face interpersonal discrimination in mainland India (McDuie-Ra, 2012; Das, 2017; Sohi & Singh, 2015; Sitlhou & Punathil, 2017; Correll, et al., 2010).

Institutional Discrimination

Institutional level discrimination and expressions of racial superiority in society are indications of racism (Bobo & Fox, 2003). The participants claimed that the locals thought of themselves as superior. The results of the survey uphold this idea as over 55% of participants answered often when asked, “You are treated with less respect than local” and “Locals act as if you are not as good as they are”.

In terms of legal discrimination, the state government has passed laws to protect the locals, and the SSC/COI holders, which actively discriminate against the out-group—the old settlers. For instance, no individual without the SSC/COI is eligible to be employed under the permanent commission for any government service within the state (Sikkim Government Establishment Rules, 1974). In the educational sector, the state government has diluted the reservations for the old settlers

from 20% to less than 5% since 1975 (Barnes & Rai, 2018) and reserved 20% of seats for the SSC/COI holders even in private institutions (Sikkim Reservation of Seats in Private Educational Institutions Act, 2008). In the healthcare sector, the government of Sikkim provides the SSC/COI holders compensation for the entire cost of hospital treatment anywhere across India if the illness cannot be treated within Sikkim. The same welfare facility is not given to any old settler. In terms of land purchasing, old settlers cannot purchase rural land and until 2020 had to pay a higher rate of stamp duty on the transfer of property (Land Revenue & Disaster Management Department, 2011). Economically, amendments were made to the income tax act to provide an exemption to the SSC/COI holders but not to the old settlers (Basu, 2008; Income Tax Act, Amend 26AAA, 2008; Thatal, 2015). Further, the SSC/COI is a mandatory document required if any old settler wants to start a company or an organization (Registration of Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2008; Sikkim Regulation of Societies, Associations and Other Voluntary Organizations Act, 2008; Sikkim Public Service Commission, 2021).

Politically, until 1979, the old settlers weren't permitted by law to vote for their state government (Bhushan, 1979). The state apparatus gerrymandered the legislative assembly seat of the Gangtok constituency from a general category seat to a reserved seat for scheduled tribes (Singh, 2020). This meant that only Bhutia's and Lepcha's could stand for election from the seat. Gangtok, where there were the highest number of mainland voters, wabs bifurcated into two constituencies—Gangtok, reserved and Arithang, general (Delimitation Has Changed Electoral Map of Sikkim, 2009). A major reason for these changes was that Balchand Sarda, an old settler won the legislative assembly election as an independent candidate in 1985, with the support of the mainlanders. Since then, no mainlander has won an election showcasing the lack of representation of the community in the state legislature. Also, no mainlander has ever received a ticket from any political party of the

state (Chakraborty, 2000). Power is considered an important criterion for prejudice to transform into racist behaviour and in the case of Sikkim, political power rests in the hands of the indigenous community, which then leads to racist policies (Sawrikar & Katz, 2009).

A common comparison cited by the participants was that of Jammu & Kashmir where recently, the Government of India accorded domicile status with equal rights to the residents of the state if they were settled therein for more than 15 years (Jameel, 2020). The participants were of the view that the same reason for providing domicile status should be followed for them as well as the Upper House of the Parliament has acknowledged the existence of discrimination. Participants highlighted that a positive step in this direction was that the state government allowed the old settlers to have a residential certificate (RC) which allowed them to buy land in the urban area. However, the RC alone was unsatisfactory as far as gaining equal rights was concerned. 47% of participants from the quantitative phases agreed that the state government had acted against their interests.

Old settlers are considered high in competency as they are economically successful and poorly on the warmth dimension as they are outsiders (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013; Oommen, 1982) therefore they experience active forms of discrimination. As proposed by the RGCT and SIT, in Sikkim, the majority has shown in-group preference by allocating resources for their benefit (Vaughan, Tajfel, & Wil, 1981; Turner & Brown, 1978).

Interpersonal Discrimination

Active and passive forms of interpersonal discrimination are faced by old settlers in Sikkim. Participants mentioned various discriminatory experiences in interpersonal settings where they felt fear and anger when they faced non verbal hostility, ethnic slurs in face to face scenarios and online

on social media sites. The existence of interpersonal discrimination indicate that the northeasterners view the old settlers low on warmth and high on competence (Cuddy, et al., 2007; Ramiah, et al., 2010).

Ethnic slurs such as *Kainyan* – a cheat, *Madhise* – a person from the mainland, and *Dhoti-ganthe* - a person who wears dhoti, were used to insinuate inferiority (Bhattacharjee, 2014; Hosmani, 2011). 48% of the participants from phase 2 claimed that they were insulted or called names. In Sikkim, social media sites have comments section filled with racist slurs and threats as it allows for anonymity (Martin & North, 2015).

Stereotypes held against old settlers are that they are "money-minded" and based on this the fight of the community against the non-exemption from income tax is viewed as a fight of "money-minded individuals" rather than one for equal rights. An important characteristic of discrimination is that the majority views that the fight for equality and justice of the minority as undeserving (Ramiah, et al., 2010). 44% of the participants from the quantitative phase felt that the locals thought of them as being dishonest indicating that the stereotype is prevalent.

Perceived Discrimination

Findings indicated that old settlers attributed perceived discrimination to the racial difference between themselves and the locals. This attribution is based on racial differences between mainlanders and northeasterners and the issue of Sikkim subject citizenship. For the old settlers, groups exist on two levels – one, based on the citizenry issue where the in-group comprises of the old settlers, and the out-group comprises Sikkim subject holders. Two, based on the issue of race where the in-group is comprised of the mainlanders and the out-group is formed by the northeasterners. In both cases of group-based identity conceptualization, the old settlers are part of

the minority and non-dominant group, creating a double jeopardy situation, which leads to discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Sherif, 1966).

Irrespective of their varying ethnicities, the old settlers consider themselves as one group and find commonality in their identity conceptualization based on their history of settlement in Sikkim and their membership in the business community. The attribution of discrimination in the case of old settlers can therefore be considered a result of their group identity over personal traits, as suggested by the personal/group discrimination discrepancy phenomena (Dion, 2001). An interesting aspect that emerged during the analysis was that five participants were not involved in business-related work and yet considered themselves as a part of the business community. This stereotyping of their identity could buffer the negative effects of perceived discrimination (Dion, 2002). The result agrees with the personal/group discrimination discrepancy phenomena (Crosby, 1982; Dion, 2001) as old settlers attribute discrimination to their group identity instead of personal traits.

Creating polarization between communities and the "us vs them" mentality feeds vote-based, anti-minority politics (Liu, 2012). According to Ramiah et al. (2010), voting for anti-immigration is a form of passive discrimination. These findings contradict some of the participants' claims that only the politicians discriminate and not the people.

The participants claimed that the locals were jealous of their economic success. Threat perception is a reaction of the majority in times of competition for material resources (Hudson, 2012). The participants felt that their contribution towards improving the economy of the state was not acknowledged. A participant stated that the old settlers suffered similarly to the locals.

The participants uniformly agreed that it is easier for the group to be discriminated against as they are not united. Ethnic differences in caste, language, and culture affect their ability to act

collectively. The case of the old settlers is similar to the Northeasterners in Delhi, where collective action suffers due to their heterogeneity (Sohi & Singh, 2014).

Reactions

Anger, disappointment, and fear were the negative feelings associated with the experience of discrimination. The participants could not express this anger individually as they were fearful of the consequences due to their minority status. Previous incidents of standing against discrimination resulted in violence from the locals, thwarting new efforts.

The participants felt betrayed by the Central Government for not taking care of their interests. They referenced the parity system, where reservations were provided to the tribal community in the state legislature to provide security and representation to them (Kazi, 2009). These benefits were not given to the old settlers - the actual minority in the state.

Passive acceptance and learned helplessness result from feelings of uncontrollability to create change (Green, 1982). The development of self-defeating attitudes and passive acceptance are the consequences of long-term discrimination (Uomoto, 1986). A participant claimed that the majority dictates democratic functioning, and in Sikkim, this has resulted in the creation of discriminatory laws. Since old settlers are a minority, they can never get a representation in the state legislature, and hence there is no solution apart from the passive acceptance of the current status.

Out-Migration is another coping strategy adopted when an individual feels targeted (Sitlhou & Punathil, 2017). The younger population of old settlers widely used this strategy. They claimed that they did not want to lead restricted lives in Sikkim. The recent reverse migration of the Northeasterners from major cities in India results from similar circumstances (Sitlhou & Punathil, 2017).

Coping Strategies

Since old settlers are less than six thousand, they do not have representation in the state legislature, and hence there is no solution apart from the passive acceptance of the current status. Passive acceptance and learned helplessness result from feelings of uncontrollability of creating change and are linked with long term discrimination (Uomoto, 1986). Theories of acculturation propose that learning the local language is an essential criteria to be accepted in society (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). The participants claimed that they know the local language "better than their mother tongues".

Collective action was taken by the community for specific events, especially when laws threatened their livelihood. For instance, the association of old settlers took out marches with black bands against the income tax amendment, where they were denied exemption. The association also approached the Supreme Court asking for intervention for the same. Anger, in this case, translated to collective action via the normative dimension (Van Zomeren et al., 2004; Tausch et al., 2011; Van Zomeren et al., 2004; Sohi & Singh (2013).

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Conclusion, Limitations and Future Directions

Discrimination in Sikkim exists against old settlers. The discrimination faced by the old settlers differs from northeasterners in mainland India in two ways. One, the northeasterners in mainland India are not institutionally discriminated. Second, the central government has created the Bezbaruah committee report (2014) to look at the grievances. They have failed to protect old settlers even though the Rajya Sabha Committee for Petitions report 145, (2013) has accepted the existence of discrimination.

The sample for the study consisted of more males and is not representative of all genders. The scholar is from the "old settler" community which might be considered as a limitation. Future studies could follow the quantitative method in assessing the levels of distress felt by the old settlers.

Implication

The implications of the study are multifold. First, it sheds light on the existence of racial discrimination occurring against racial groups other than northeasterners in India. Second, the study expands the geographical space where racial discrimination occurs from only in the mainland to within the northeastern region. Third, the finding that old settlers, who form a part of the mainland Indian community in Sikkim, are institutionally discriminated by their government is a major cause of concern as it can be considered a form of human rights violation. This is significant and requires deeper probe, especially in other states of the northeastern region to get a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The ignorance of their situation by the central and state governments by not including them as a group that needs policy and political support also indicates the lack of value placed on minorities with low political power and votes, indicating that in democratic settings, institutional discrimination is still possible. Overall, the study is important for social scientists, policy makers, and legislature when debating race and racial discrimination in India as it provides a different perspective. Combined with the existing paradigm of discrimination faced by northeasterners, this study adds to the literature providing a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective to the narrative

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